

Health Care

Before

entering Congress, I spent 23 years of my life working as a health care professional. As a clinical psychologist, I specialized in working with brain injury, stroke, and cancer patients and their families. I also worked in VA hospitals, outpatient clinics, child and adolescent treatment centers, and a number of other clinical mental health settings.

The causes of these problems

are complex and solutions will not be easy, but a number of steps can be taken immediately to help relieve the pressure as we develop comprehensive plans. These key steps include:

1. Reducing and simplifying the paperwork burden facing doctors, hospitals, and clinics.
2. Helping doctors, hospitals, and clinics cope with the financial burdens and challenges of treating the uninsured.
3. Providing tax and other incentives to help the self-employed and small businesses purchase health insurance at affordable rates.
4. Solving the growing problems of malpractice insurance and tort claims.
5. Eliminating the unjust disparities in Medicare compensation rates for states like Washington.
6. Encouraging greater personal responsibility to reduce the costs of preventable illnesses.
7. Assuring that every child has access to quality health care.
8. Improving access to quality mental health care.
9. Continuing to fund cutting-edge research to prevent, treat, and cure diseases such as cancer, diabetes, MS, HIV, and others.
10. Encourage more responsible preparation for illness prevention and health care costs.

Few things in life are as precious as health and we must all work together to solve the challenges facing us today and in the future.

Proposing Comprehensive Reform

Congressman Baird believes we must comprehensively reform the health care system in order to lower skyrocketing costs and expand coverage to the nearly 47 million Americans who are currently uninsured.

The Healthy Americans Act guarantees private health insurance for all Americans by:

- Ensuring that every American has a high-quality, private health care plan that is comparable to what Members of Congress now enjoy.
- Establishing a sliding scale of health care premium assistance for low-income Americans.
- Creating a health care tax credit to help Americans cover the cost of their health care plan.
- Requiring every American to purchase a private health care plan.

The Healthy Americans Act eliminates the link between employment and health care by:

- Ending the employer health care tax deduction and replacing it with a personal tax credit.
- Requiring employers who currently provide employee health benefits to convert their health care premiums into higher wages that employees will use to purchase their own private health insurance for the first four years.
- Requiring employers to make payments to the federal government, on a sliding scale depending on the number of employees, to fund premium subsidies. Employers who do not currently provide health benefits will be required to begin making phased-in payments immediately; after four years, all employers will be making these payments.

The Healthy Americans Act protects consumers by:

- Prohibiting discrimination against beneficiaries based on health status or genetics.
- Allowing plans to use financial incentives to reward beneficiaries who enroll in wellness programs or otherwise pursue a healthy lifestyle.
- Establishing a Health Help Agency in each state to coordinate payments from employers, individuals and government; coordinate enrollment of individuals in private health care plans; and provide consumers with unbiased information about competing health care plans.
- Requiring insurers to use standardized common forms to make health care more transparent for consumers.
- Providing additional research and education efforts on the comparative effectiveness of health care items to ensure that consumers receive effective, quality care.
- Allowing beneficiaries to purchase additional coverage above and beyond the federal standard if they choose.
- Maintaining employer-based retiree health plan for individuals who are already retired and Medicare, and preserving health plans negotiated as part of a collective bargaining agreement for as long as nine years.

The Healthy Americans Act protects consumers by:

- The Healthy Americans Act reallocates federal resources by:
 - Phasing out the Disproportionate Share Hospital payments program, which provides compensation to hospitals treating the uninsured. Universal coverage will obviate the need for this program.
 - Phasing out the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) in favor of coverage under the Healthy Americans Act.
 - Ending non-supplemental Medicaid and providing basic health care for low income Americans.

According to a comprehensive review and score by the nonpartisan Lewin Group, the Healthy Americans Act will increase coverage and decrease costs by:

- Providing health care coverage to 99% of Americans.

- Cutting

national spending on health care, both public and private, and creating a long term savings of \$1.48 trillion over the next ten years.

Preparing for Avian Flu and Other Infectious Diseases

We tend to take for granted that we are now safe from infectious diseases. We believe that infectious disease pandemics are relics of the past or tragedies that affect other parts of the world. And we wrongly trust that science and medicine will protect us if a new infectious disease were to arise. Unfortunately, human history shows us that at least once a century, and sometimes more often, a global or regional disease can kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of people or more. In this day and age, increased air travel helps disease spread even faster. We must acknowledge and recognize that we are not safe and that we must protect ourselves from the inevitable.

Despite these stark realities, there is every disincentive preventing companies from investing in the research, development, and manufacturing of treatments for these infectious diseases. The disease we most often hear about is Avian Flu, but just a few years ago it was SARS, and before that, the Ebola virus. These pandemics can do great harm - for instance, the 1918 pandemic flu killed 675,000 Americans.

More

routine infectious diseases can also have an impact. One and a half million people contract drug resistant bacterial infections in our hospitals annually. Drug resistant pathogens currently cost the country \$5 billion annually, and this cost would skyrocket if a pandemic broke out among humans. The Institute of Medicine has identified drug resistance as an increasing threat to our public health.

Congressman Baird has introduced the bipartisan Beating Infections through Research and Development (BIRD) Act. The bill would create new incentives for companies to invest in research and development to help diagnose and treat infectious diseases. Specifically, the bill would allow fast track FDA review, patent extensions, and tax credits on infectious disease research and manufacturing.

Ensuring Fair Pay for our Doctors

Many doctors in our region are forced to turn Medicare patients away because Medicare payments don't cover the cost of care. Some have even moved their practices to other states where they will receive a higher per-patient reimbursement from Medicare. For example, Florida receives 28 percent more funding per Medicare patient than Washington. Essentially, our state receives less per patient because our healthcare system is efficient and cost-effective. Every one of our seniors has paid the same percentage of their income towards Medicare as seniors in other states and they deserve to receive the same treatment regardless of where they live. It is time to stop penalizing seniors who live in

the Northwest.

Congressman Baird has worked closely with the rest of the Washington delegation and a bi-partisan coalition of Representatives and Senators to resolve this inequity. Together, they helped include some improvements in the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act. Unfortunately, the changes do not fully establish equity for our region, so Congressman Baird will continue to fight for fair rates and equal treatment access.

The problem is not just regional. The reimbursement formula utilized by the federal government for Medicare recipients is inherently flawed. Congressman Baird is working to ensure Medicare adequately reimburses physicians nationwide who treat Medicare recipients. For years, our physicians have subsidized the treatment of Medicare patients because government reimbursements failed to cover their costs. Sadly, many physicians are now financially unable to accept new Medicare patients. Congressman Baird has supported the bipartisan Preserving Patient Access to Physicians Act. This legislation would repeal the current reimbursement formula and replace it with a more sensible rate that better accounts for increasing healthcare costs.

Addressing Rising Medical Malpractice Insurance Costs

The problem of rising medical liability insurance costs is complex, and many have come to believe that the current situation is undermining our health care system, demoralizing health care professionals, costing billions of dollars per year, failing to substantially reduce medical errors, and still leaving many patients with legitimate claims unsupported. Faced with these concerns, Congressman Baird acknowledges that common sense, balanced reform is both essential and imminent, and that reform should constrain the cost of medical liability insurance and reduce unwarranted litigation, protect the rights of patients who have been harmed to received compensation, and improve the quality of health care in this country.

Congressman Baird introduced the Comprehensive Medical Malpractice Reform Act. The legislation:

- Regulates and reforms the medical malpractice insurance industry;
- Provides alternatives to litigation through the promotion of successful mediation practices;;
- Improves the quality of health care in this country;
- Reduces frivolous lawsuits and sets reasonable limits on non-economic damages; and,
- Excludes medical devices and pharmaceuticals from the cap on non-economic damages.

Congressman Baird believes this approach is likely to improve patient care, reduce medical errors, lower the costs of litigation, and still provide avenues for patients who have been harmed to receive compensation and support. He is strongly committed to a bipartisan and

practical approach to medical malpractice reform, taking into consideration the views and concerns of all persons affected by the outcome. He will continue to work with his colleagues in Congress and with the Administration to achieve this common goal.

Ensuring Equal Access to Mental Health Services

As a mental health professional, and one of only two clinical psychologists serving in Congress, Congressman Baird has firsthand knowledge of the impact and importance of mental health treatment and the inequities that often exist in funding and consideration for mental health treatments. In order to correct this imbalance Congressman Baird has been a lead advocate of the bipartisan Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act. This law would prohibit health plans from imposing time limits and similar restrictions on the treatment of mental health disorders, if similar restrictions are not imposed on medical and surgical benefits. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reports that this would lead to less than a two percent increase in premiums, and it would remove one of the barriers that keep millions of Americans from receiving the mental health care they need. The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act passed the House on March 5, 2007.

Providing Options to Small Businesses

With nearly 47 million uninsured Americans, access to affordable health care is one of the most challenging problems facing America today. Because of the high cost of health care coverage, many small businesses simply cannot afford to provide insurance to their employees. Small business owners have expressed support for Small Business Health Plans, which allow businesses to join together to provide coverage to their employees. By banding together to purchase insurance, businesses and employers share the costs and reduce the individual financial burden that can keep companies from offering coverage to workers.

While Congressman Baird initially had reservations about Small Business Health Plans, he met repeatedly with local business leaders to learn more about the obstacles they encounter and the benefits of cost-sharing associated with these health plans. Although there is certainly room for further improvements in the area of solvency and viability of the insurers and protections for mental health and other benefits, Congressman Baird believes that - in the end - it is far better for employees and businesses to have insurance they can afford and has voted in support of Small Business Health Plans.

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Food
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United
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The
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